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**HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE OPERATIONS: UNDERSTANDING THE
BASICS**

by

Frank Panter

Lieutenant Colonel, U. S. Marine Corps

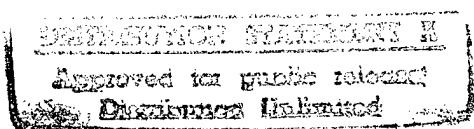
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Signature: Frank Panter

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James F. Miskel 5-12-97
Prof James F. Miskel Date
Faculty Advisor

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ABSTRACT

Today's reality requires the military commander to be prepared to engage in missions that were previously considered nontraditional. In complex missions such as Humanitarian Assistance (HA) operations, the military will probably assume a supporting role—a role with which most aggressive military commanders are not accustomed. To be effective in responding to these complex humanitarian crises, the commander must first properly assess the situation at the earliest opportunity. A proper assessment allows the commander to focus his planning and to tailor his force, thus ensuring that the right capabilities are being deployed into the theater. Secondly, the commander must establish mechanisms such as the Humanitarian Operations Center (HOC) and the Civil-Military Operations Center (CMOC) to facilitate coordination with all the varied organizations involved. Lastly, the operational commander must be able to develop a unity of effort when ad hoc coalitions are formed during HA operations.

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE OPERATIONS: UNDERSTANDING THE BASICS

Changing Global Conditions and the Military Commander

The post Cold War era has presented the military commander with increased challenges that were previously considered as nontraditional military roles. Today, military planning cannot be dominated by a potential single conflict between super powers that may result in an all-out global war. The military commander must understand that foreign policy in recent years has become increasingly involved in the domestic affairs of failing and emerging states.¹ In the past few years, numerous conflicts and crises resulting from social and environmental pressures have caused dramatic human suffering. Conditions in these complex, humanitarian emergencies have been made very visible and immediate through the international news media. In some cases, rapid military responses were necessary. Joint Pub 3-07 defines these emergencies as Humanitarian Assistance (HA) operations. In these operations, the military is tasked to assist in the reduction of human suffering caused by natural or manmade disasters in countries outside the United States.² In most cases the military is assigned a supporting role—for many aggressive military commanders this can be a painful experience.

Like it or not, reality dictates that the military commander of today be prepared to respond to challenges presented by HA operations—to include being assigned a supporting role in the operation. To be effective in responding to a complex humanitarian crisis, circumstances must first be properly assessed at the earliest opportunity to ensure that proper

¹ Stanley Hoffman, “Out of the Cold: Humanitarian Intervention in the 1990s,” *Harvard International Review*, Fall 1993, 8.

² Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other Than War*, Joint Pub 3-07 (Fort Monroe, VA: 1995), III-4.

assets are being applied to assist in the improvement and stabilization of the situation. Secondly, emergencies requiring humanitarian assistance can have significant political and military dimensions that require close coordination of all organizations involved. This coordination requires dialogue and planning with numerous multinational political, diplomatic, military, and relief organizations that may not be familiar to military planners and in some cases, may be uncooperative. Lastly, ad hoc military coalitions are formed where members may have differing views of the mission's objectives, priorities, and end state.³ To be effective, the operational commander must be able to focus on the mission and develop a unity of effort by all coalition members.

Many operations fall under the Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW) umbrella. This paper will just examine some of the basic challenges of the HA operation. Some of the issues that will be discussed may certainly be applied to other military operations at the lower end of the conflict spectrum however. But first, lets look at how the military gets involved in humanitarian assistance efforts.

Military Intervention in Relief Efforts: How does it Happen?

Dwindling resources makes the decision to commit U.S. military forces in support of humanitarian assistance operations an extremely difficult decision. Interest for U.S. intervention in support of international HA operations can be generated by various means. Catalysts may range from public support generated by televised evening news stories to the National Command Authority (NCA) perceiving a potential threat to a region considered of interest to the United States.

³ Department of State and I Marine Expeditionary Force, FMF, *Conference Report on Integrating Military and Civilian Efforts in Humanitarian Assistance And Peace Operations* (Camp Pendleton, California: 1995), 3.

Responsibility for declaring a foreign disaster that would require U.S. humanitarian assistance rests initially with the Department of State and the U.S. ambassador in country. Normally, the ambassador declares a disaster based upon a request for assistance from the host nation government and input from the U.S. country team. With or without the ambassador's endorsement however, the NCA may deem the humanitarian situation serious enough that employment of U.S. armed forces is necessary.⁴ In most circumstances however, U.S. military intervention is based on the following considerations:

- The situation exceeds the host nation capacity.
- A strong possibility exists that there will be large-scale human suffering unless outside assistance occurs.
- Nonmilitary national and international agencies are unable or unwilling to provide the necessary resources to solve the crisis.
- Either the host nation has invited U.S. military intervention or an appropriate international organization (e.g., the U.N.) has approved the intervention.⁵
- U.S. military assets would make a critical contribution to the relief effort and are available and readily transportable to the location.
- It is expected that the U.S. military intervention will be of short duration and that civilian authorities will shoulder the responsibility as soon as possible.

The above considerations illustrate how U.S. military intervention occurs. Lets look circumstances in a couple of recent operations such as SEA ANGEL and PROVIDE RELIEF. In late April 1991, a cyclone slammed into the Chittagong-Cox's Bazaar coast of Bangladesh. By the best government estimates, up to 138,000 lives were lost and 2.7 million people were left homeless. The Port of Chittagong and much of the Bangladesh Navy were destroyed rendering the local authorities incapable of managing the recovery effort. Recognizing that conditions exceeded the country's capabilities to respond, a request for assistance was forwarded to Washington, via the U.S. ambassador, from the civilian government of

⁴ Air Land Sea Application Center, *Multiservice Procedures for Humanitarian Assistance Operations*, (Washington: Secretary of the Army, 1994), 2-1.

Bangladesh. The U.S. National Command Authority approved the request from Bangladesh and tasked the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to provide military forces in support of relief operations. The Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Command (USCINCPAC) was ultimately charged with executing OPERATION PRODUCTIVE EFFORT (later changed to SEA ANGEL) to provide a Joint Task Force (JTF) to conduct HA operations.⁶ Thus, an operational JTF was committed to a nontraditional role, that of disaster relief.

In the fall of 1991, numerous private international relief organizations had attempted to provide aid to Somalia in the aftermath of the fall of the Siad Barre regime. A very dangerous security vacuum had developed in which bands of armed gunmen preyed upon each other and innocent civilians. This made any humanitarian relief efforts conducted solely by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and private volunteer organizations (PVOs) almost impossible. Recognizing the need to stabilize a country where anarchy and starvation was the rule rather than the exception, the United Nations passed Resolution 751 in April 1992. This resolution provided for the phased presence of military forces to improve the security situation to permit the international relief organizations to operate.⁷ Due to many domestic and international pressures, with influences from the news media, the U.S. offered to lead the U.N.-sponsored operation identified as RESTORE HOPE. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, with tasking from the NCA, turned this time to the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Central Command (USCINCCENT) to execute the operation by providing a Joint/Combined

⁵ LtGen Henry C. Stackpole III and Col Eric L. Chase, "Humanitarian Intervention and Disaster Relief: Projecting Military Strength Abroad to Save Lives," *Marine Corps Gazette*, February 1993, 18.

⁶ Center for Naval Warfare Studies, *OPERATION SEA ANGEL; A Retrospective on the 1991 Humanitarian Relief Operation in Bangladesh*, (Newport, R.I.: 1992), 4-5.

⁷ General Joseph P. Hoar, "A CINC's Perspective," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Autumn 1993, 56-57.

Task Force. Circumstances led to military involvement in a nontraditional role that placed the operational military commander at the “pointed end of the spear” with NGOs/PVOs.

Effective military commanders must realize the complexity of the HA operations and plan accordingly. To be effective, the JTF commander must ensure he brings the correct mix of forces and capabilities to the theater. The correct ‘tailoring’ of the JTF force structure is achieved by conducting a proper assessment of the situation.

The First Critical Step: The Assessment

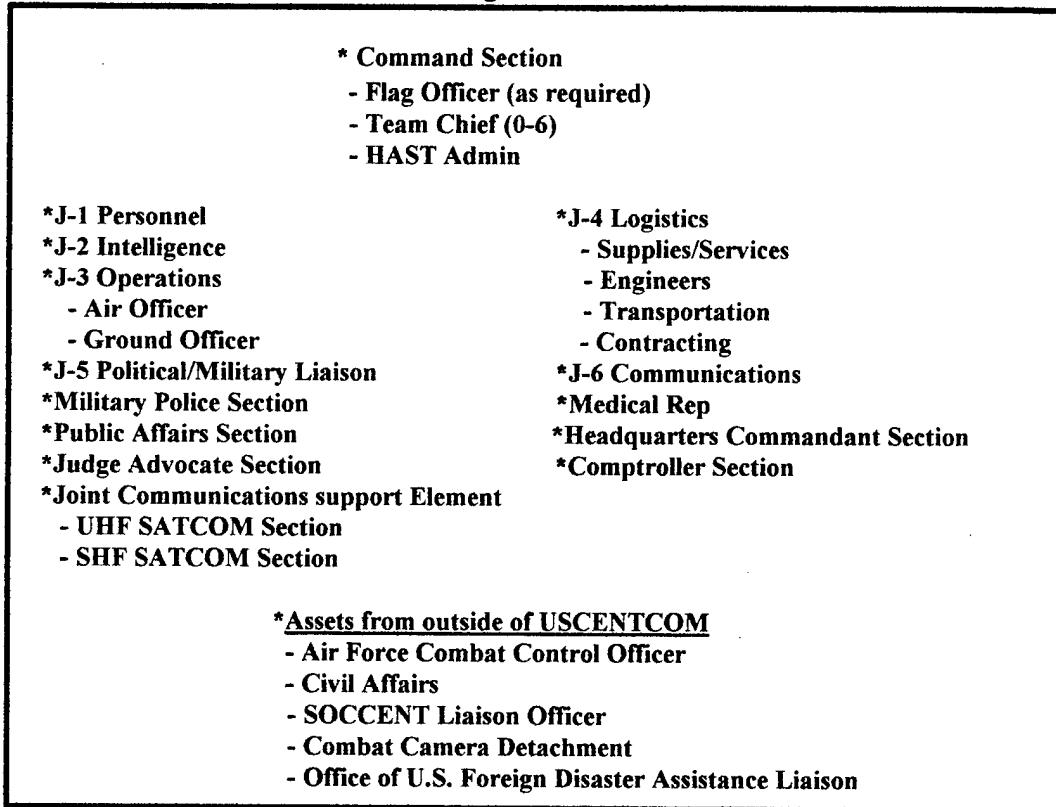
In deciding if a JTF is required to accomplish the HA mission, the CINC may organize and send a Humanitarian Assistance Survey Team (HAST) or similar organization to the affected area. This is done to acquire needed information to develop a clear mission statement and plan for the operation. The assessment survey can assist the CINC in answering the four questions of operational art relating to ends, ways, means, and costs/risks—thus clarifying mission requirements. The CINC’s and the designated JTF Commander’s planning is based on the information gained from the assessment phase of HA operations. The assessment provides information that will answer questions relating to:

- Capabilities of host nation.
- Critical factors that would ‘tailor’ the make-up of the JTF (availability/condition of infrastructure, transportation, sustainment, etc.)
- Security concerns for force protection.
- Potential sectors of main effort.
- Phasing of the HA operation.
- Initial operational sequencing and synchronization.
- Coordination required with external organizations.

Under the HAST concept, the team is made up of personnel from various staff sections representing functional areas that can provide expertise in evaluating different aspects of the

situation.⁸ Depending on the CINC's aims and the location of the crisis, the HAST may be employed in three different ways. First, where a senior State Department representative is not present or is unable to assist, the assessment team may operate independently. Secondly, the HAST may serve as an advance element (ADVON) for a Humanitarian Assistance Joint Task Force (HAJTF). Thirdly, the HAST may serve as adjunct to the U.S. Embassy or to the senior representative of the Agency for International Development (AID). The last case might occur when no follow-on military forces are required. Representatives from outside of the command may be asked to participate as required to enhance the teams' efforts. At U.S. Central Command, the team make-up is depicted in Figure-1:

Figure-1.



U.S. Central Command HAST Configuration⁹

⁸ Air Land Sea Application Center, 3-2.

⁹ U.S. Central Command, *Humanitarian Assistance Survey Team (HAST) Standing Operating Procedures*, R 525-25 (Tampa, FL: 1993), A-1, 2.

As depicted above in CENTCOM's HAST organization, various functional areas are represented. CENTCOM's HAST has approximately 55-60 people assigned as a secondary duty and they regularly conduct recalls and training. On August 16, 1992 CENTCOM deployed its HAST for Operation PROVIDE RELIEF and it ultimately became the nucleus for the follow-on JTF which was established within days. The initial mission of the JTF was to both organize and operate the airlift of humanitarian relief supplies into Somalia.¹⁰ It should be noted that CENTCOM's HAST is tailored to meet the need of the mission assigned. A smaller team could be dispatched dependent on the mission.

Others have different concepts on conducting the assessment. Lieutenant General Anthony Zinni USMC, known in the joint community for his experience in humanitarian assistance and peace-keeping operations, has a different perspective on the assessment organization. He agrees that a thorough, rapid assessment needs to be made prior to deploying any follow-on forces but stresses the use of Special Operations Forces (SOF). General Zinni states that SOF teams are already familiar with the affected area and have the inherent capability to conduct a rapid and valid assessment.¹¹ He further states that whatever organization is used, SOCOM forces or conventional forces, the primary importance is to complete a proper assessment as quickly as possible to expedite follow-on planning.¹²

¹⁰ Hoar, 57.

¹¹ LtGen Anthony Zinni, "Lessons Learned for Humanitarian and Peace Keeping Operations," Lecture, U.S. Central Command, Tampa, FL: 13 September 1995.

¹² Note: LtGen Zinni is currently the DCINC of CENTCOM. At the time of the writing of this paper, USCENTCOM is passing the assessment team responsibility to the Special Operations Command, Central Command (SOCENT).

Even in the early stages of a HA operation coordination of military and civilian efforts is essential. The U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) sends a Disaster Response Team (DART) early during major disasters to the affected area. The DART consists of U.S. officials and contractors with a variety of disaster relief skills to conduct the assessment for OFDA. Typically the DART arrives in the initial stages, often before U.S. military assessment teams and serves as the initial focal point for the U.S. response effort.¹³ The regional CINC's assessment team should coordinate with the DART at the earliest and if possible, conduct the initial assessment closely together. This will avoid inconsistent reporting up the two chains, forms a relationship for future operations, and draws on the expertise of both assessment groups.

Where feasible, these assessment teams should include host nation representatives. During civil conflict situations however, government officials may not always be appropriate representatives to assist in the assessment.¹⁴ Local nongovernment organizations such as the Red Cross, churches, universities, and other domestic organizations may be able to provide a true local insight into what is needed.¹⁵

A rapid, accurate assessment evaluates the extent and magnitude of the crisis. It provides the CINC information regarding the availability of local resources and the need for external resources and capabilities to be brought into the theater of operations. A quick, proper assessment lays the foundation for planning and assists in the decision to

¹³ Center for Naval Analyses, *Command Relationships in Humanitarian Assistance Operations*, (Alexandria, VA: 1995), 16.

¹⁴ Michael J. Toole, "The Rapid Assessment of Health Problems in Refugee and Displaced Populations," *Medicine & Global Survival*, December 1994, 201.

¹⁵ Toole, 202.

deploy additional forces. Different CINCs have different ways of assessing potential HA operations. What is of importance is not so much what the assessment organization is called, but what functional capability it has to conduct a proper assessment and to develop an initial dialog with other organizations involved.

Unity of Effort—or “Can’t We All Just Get Along?”

Recent HA operations identified several challenges relating to civil-military relations that complicated relief efforts. The basic lack of understanding of the different organizational cultures between the military and civilian humanitarian relief organizations (HROs) can prevent effective coordination from occurring. When President Bush ordered the U.S. military to Kurdistan in June 1991 many of the private voluntary organizations (PVOs), particularly European, refused to operate cooperatively with the military.¹⁶ In Somalia, some forty-nine HROs had been “in country” off and on since the 1980’s and viewed the arrival of the military as a control mechanism thrust upon them.¹⁷ As the world became more interested in the suffering occurring in Somalia, the number of HROs increased as depicted in Figure 2.

Figure-2.

	International NGOs	Local NGOs	UN Agencies	Red Cross	Total HROs
December 1992	21	2	6	2	31
March 1993	44	8	6	2	60

Number of HROs in Somalia¹⁸

¹⁶ Andrew S. Natsios, “The International Humanitarian Response System,” *Parameters*, Spring 1995, 69. Note: The term PVO is used mainly by the U.S. while most of the rest of the world uses the term non-governmental organization (NGO).

¹⁷ Susan G. Sweatt, “The Challenges of Civil-Military Relations in Operations at the Trailing Edge of War,” Unpublished Research Paper, U.S. Naval War College, Newport, RI: 1995.

¹⁸ Jonathan T. Dworken, *Military Relations With Humanitarian Relief Organizations: Observations from Restore Hope*, Center for Naval Analyses, (Alexandria, VA: October 1993), 14.

Most PVOs are private organizations by their charter but accept grants of federal funding from the previously mentioned USAID and other governmental agencies. For a PVO to remain eligible to receive such grants, the law specifies that the organization must raise at least 20% of its total income from the private sector.¹⁹ Some PVOs however, accept no USAID money in order to maintain their distance from any governmental control or interference. Many PVOs (along with some U.N. agencies) often fear that their efforts might be compromised by “guilt by association” if they openly cooperate with U.S. military forces.²⁰ In some situations, the PVOs may lose hard earned access if they appear to be part of a U.S. governmental organization. Others, by charter, are not allowed to directly associate with military organizations.

In most humanitarian assistance operations, the military is to support and to enhance humanitarian efforts that are probably already taking place. This can be a bitter pill for a military commander to swallow. The operational commander and his staff must avoid duplicating and usurping the role of humanitarian agencies that are already ‘in the fight’ so to speak.²¹ A relationship must be established between the military and the HROs that fosters an unity of effort in the ongoing relief efforts. The true challenge is to establish a communication and coordination system that unifies the ongoing efforts by everyone involved.

During Operation RESTORE HOPE in Somalia, the I Marine Expeditionary Force planners recognized the need to cooperate and coordinate with the various HROs. To

¹⁹ Natsios, 69.

²⁰ Hugo Slim, “The Continuing Metamorphosis of the Humanitarian Practitioner: Some New Colours for an Endangered Chameleon,” *Disasters*, Volume 19 No. 2, 1995, 119.

²¹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *A UNHCR Handbook for the Military on Humanitarian Operations*, (Geneva: January 1995), 22.

enhance the unity of effort, the commander of the JTF requested and established Humanitarian Operations Centers (HOCs) in Mogadishu and the outlying humanitarian relief sectors (HRSs).²² The missions of the HOCs were to: (1) develop and implement the established relief strategy, (2) apportion logistical support for the various HROs, and (3) arrange for military support for the various relief organizations.²³ When established, the HOC is more of a policy-making and governing body than a command and control organization. It is made up of senior representatives from the military, UN agencies, Department of State, USAID, PVOs, NGOs, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), host nation, and the civil-military operations center (CMOC).

To be effective in humanitarian assistance operations, close coordination is required among many participants. The commander of the JTF can establish a civil-military operations center (CMOC) to carry out the day-to-day coordination with the various PVOs/NGOs. The CMOC matches military capabilities with the relief organizations' support needs. Given the success of the COMC concept in Bangladesh, Somalia, Rwanda, and Haiti, the concept is now part of joint doctrine.²⁴ CMOC military members work with DART officials to coordinate military support to relief groups by validating HRO requests for assistance. The JTF then tasks the subordinate commands to provide the support.

Coordination mechanisms such as the HOC and CMOC are essential in working with the wide range organizations inherent in HA operations. The JTF is bombarded

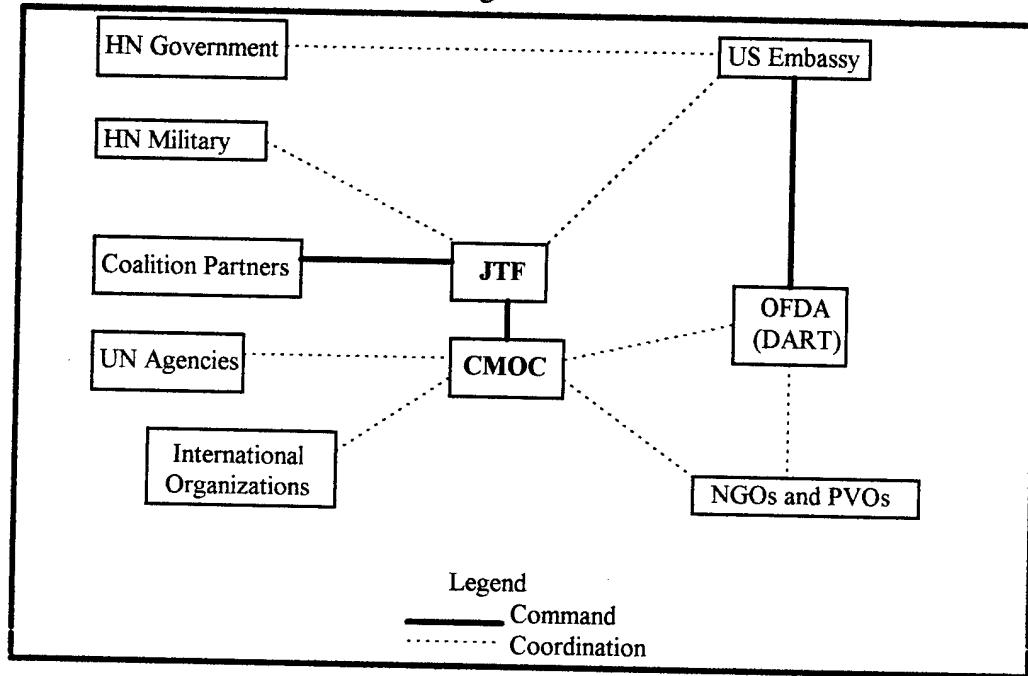
²² Jonathan T. Dworken, 17.

²³ Jonathan T. Dworken, "Restore Hope: Coordinating Relief Operations," *Joint Force Quarterly*, Summer 1995, 16.

²⁴ Center for Naval Analyses, *Command Relationships in Humanitarian Assistance Operations*, (Alexandria, VA: March 1995), 17.

with external information and requests and must form relationships that may appear unconventional to the typical military person. The JTF staff must understand this and strive to foster mechanisms to encourage a unity of effort. Figure 3 depicts some, though not all, of the many sources of input and coordination relationships needed of a humanitarian assistance JTF (HAJTF) to succeed.²⁵

Figure-3.



Coordination Requirements.

Most problems relating to civil-military coordination can be overcome by increased JTF-HRO interaction but without going "native." Even though these organizational cultures may be contradictory at times, the JTF commander can foster an environment of unity of effort by conducting the following actions:

²⁵ *Multiservice Procedures for Humanitarian Assistance Operations*, 4-13.

- Staff the CMOCs with officers that are mature and experienced enough to understand the importance of having coordinated efforts between the JTF and the HROs.
- Stress the importance of CMOCs and highlight the positive effects of HRO coordination.
- Ensure the military and HROs understand how each other operates. Soliciting information from relief workers and briefing them on doctrine and capabilities helps form a basis of knowledge for future cooperation.
- Involve relief organizations in the military decision making. By getting HRO input, the JTF commander increases his knowledge base and enhances HRO acceptance of military operations.
- Ensure that the JTF staff see the NGOs and PVOs as relief ‘partners.’ This will foster enhanced coordination and will reduce suspicion by all parties involved. After all, many of the HROs were there before the military deployed and will be there long after the JTF goes home.²⁶

Coalition Efforts: More is not Always Merrier

More often than not, the JTF commander will be in command of multinational forces during HA operations. During RESTORE HOPE in Somalia there were close to 30 countries participating. In Northern Iraq for PROVIDE COMFORT, there were 13 countries providing military forces. Because of differences in culture, customs, religion, standards of living and military capability, coalition partners may have differing views of the mission objectives, priorities, and even end state. For example, at one time in PROVIDE RELIEF, military forces from eight different nations defended the airfield at Mogadishu because they were deployed to Somalia without any clear objectives in mind and did not have the logistical capability to go any farther.²⁷

Dealing with coalition partners must be done with patience and respect. The JTF commander must emphasize the spirit of cooperation to his staff and subordinate units. Unity of command is often sacrificed early in the operation because of international

²⁶ Jonathan T. Dworken, 20.

²⁷ Zinni, lecture.

political pressures and unity of effort is the best that a combined force can hope to achieve. The combined commander must develop an environment that fosters this unity of effort. Some key considerations are:

- The JTF commander must understand the political will and national interests of coalition partners—no easy task.²⁸
- Seek compatibility of forces when assigning missions. For example, former colonial powers with special interests in certain regions may have their own agendas. This may cause friction among coalition partners and complicate the cooperative effort.²⁹
- Develop a combined JTF staff which includes equitable representation of coalition members. This fosters unity of effort in all phases of the operation.
- When developing the combined plan, the JTF must be aware of unique capabilities of allies and assign them missions that optimizes their strengths. This not only increases their confidence, it also enhances the commander's chances for success.
- Simplicity is the key to combined operations. The plan must easily be understood—especially considering language, culture, and doctrinal differences.
- Aggressively share intelligence. While U.S. forces have sophisticated technical intelligence gathering capabilities, coalition partners may share the same religious, ethnic, culture or political background as the host nation. Capitalize on these assets.³⁰
- Provide liaison officers and Coalition Support Teams (CST) to participating coalition members. This enhances the ability of allied forces to understand the commander's intent, enhances unity of effort, and clarifies issues such as rules of engagement.

Recent experience of combined HA operations reveals that effectively integrating multinational forces requires unique skills by the commander and his staff. Operational commanders must train their staffs to be sensitive to potential problems of political, ethical, and religious differences. Additionally, technical, doctrinal, and procedural interoperability problems must be overcome by the JTF planners.³¹ Ad hoc coalitions are increasing in

²⁸ Joint Warfighting Center, *Joint Task Force Commander's Handbook for Peace Operations*, (Fort Monroe, VA: 1995), 11.

²⁹ Zinni, lecture.

³⁰ Col Mark F. Cancian, "Is There a Coalition in Your Future?", *Marine Corps Gazette*, June 1996, 29.

³¹ Terry J. Pudas, "Preparing Future Coalition Commanders," *Joint Force Quarterly*, Winter 1993.

number as result of the changing international political environment. The successful operational commander will effectively utilize the strengths of a combined force.

Conclusion

It is likely that U.S. military forces will be deployed to participate in HA operations in the future. To enhance the chances for success, the military commander must conduct a proper assessment of the situation as quickly as possible. This assessment will facilitate operational planning and provide information so the commander can bring the right mix of forces and capabilities into the theater. The commander must also be prepared to conduct close coordination with organizations that may be unfamiliar to him and his staff. Coordinating mechanisms such as HOCs and CMOCs are critical in developing a unity of effort during relief operations. Lastly, the combined JTF commander must recognize the strengths and weaknesses of his coalition partners. He must expertly utilize the forces assigned to him and foster a spirit of cooperation among his staff, external organizations and coalition partners.

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